

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1142

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 1747

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJ: THE OPPOSITION'S DILEMMA

REF: MANILA 1660

1. SUMMARY: BLOC VOTING SCHEME INSERTED INTO ELECTION CODE AT JANUARY 26-27 SPECIAL SESSION OF BATASANG BAYAN (LEGISLATIVE ADVISORY COUNCIL) HAS CAUSED OPPOSITION TO BACK AWAY FOR PREVIOUS PLANS TO PARTICIPATE IN APRIL 2 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. LIBERAL PARTY (LP) ISSUED STATEMENT JANUARY 31 SETTING TEN-PRE-CONIDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION. FORMER LP SENATOR RODRIGO HAS INFORMED EMBOFF THAT MANY OPPOSITIONISTS, INCLUDING BENIGNO AQUINO, FAVOR RUNNING EVEN IF BLOC VOTING FORMAT REMAINS IN EFFECT, BUT THAT JOVITO SALONGA NOW ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO PARTICIPATION AND HAS CARRIED OTHERS WITH HIM. THERE IS STILL SOME POSSIBILITY PRESIDENT MARCOS MAY CHANGE MIND AND ELIMINATE BLOC VOTING PROVISION BEFORE SIGNING ELECTION CODE. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERAL PARTY'S PRECONDITIONS. LIBERAL PARTY LEADERS GERARDO ROXAS AND JOVITO SALONGA CALLED PRESS CONFERENCE JANUARY 31 AT WHICH THEY RELEASED STATEMENT ON FORTHCOMING BATASANG PAMBANSA ELECTIONS. (NOTE: LP, ONE OF PHILIPPINES TWO MAJOR TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES, CONFIDENTIAL

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HAS BEEN DORMANT SINCE MARTIAL LAW. ROXAS IS LP PRESIDENT. SALONGA IS CHAIRMAN OF LP STEERING COMMITTEE, AS WILL AS HEAD OF KABAKA (PEOPLE'S ALTERNATIVE), A LOOSE-KNIT GROUP OF OPPOSITIONISTS WHICH INCLUDES A NUMBER OF NON-LP'S.) STATEMENT DENOUNCES THE "NOTORIOUS BLOC VOTING SYSTEM" ADOPTED BY BATASANG BAYAN (SEE REFTEL). IT POINTS OUT THAT BLOC VOTING WAS ONE OF THE MAIN FEATURES

OF THE FRAUDELENT ELECTIONS OF 1947 AND 1949 AND WAS THEREAFTER DROPPED BECAUSE OF POPULAR OUTCRY. IT ARGUES THAT BATASANG BAYAN HAS MADE IT VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY NON-ADMINISTRATION CANDIDATE TO WIN, THROUGH USE OF BLOC VOTING, LIFTING THE BAN ON PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS, AND OTHER SIMILAR DEVICES. THE STATEMENT CONCLUDES THAT LP WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE APRIL 2 ELECTIONS UNLESS STEPS TAKEN TO:

- RULE OUT BLOC VOTING;
- RESTORE FREEDOMS OF PRESS, ASSEMBLY, AND SPEECH (VICE LIFT MARTIAL LAW);
- PROVIDE REASONABLE CAMPAIGN PERIOD (DELIBERATELY LEFT VAGUE, BUT -60-90 DAYS)
- ABOLISH SYSTEM OF INSTANT VOTER REGISTRATION USED IN 1977 REFERENDUM;
- SET UP TRULY NON-PARTISAN CITIZEN'S ELECTIONS COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT POLLING;
- CONFINE ARMED FORCES TO BARRACKS DURING ELECTION;
- RESTORE ADVANCE ELECTION RETURN SYSTEM AND RIGHT OF ALL PARTICIPATING POLITICAL GROUPS TO DULY SIGN CERTIFICATES OF VOTES;
- ENSURE OPPOSITION REPRESENTATION DURING PRINTING AND DISTRIBUTION OF BALLOTS;
- REQUIRE RESIGNATION OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS WHO RUN FOR BATASANG PAMBANSA SEATS;
- BAN ELECTION DOLE-OUTS AND DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC FUNDS

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FOR CAMPAIGN PURPOSES.

3. AQUINO ANXIOUS TO RUN. FORMER SENATOR AND LP LEADER SOC RODRIGO DISCUSSED LP STATEMENT WITH EMBOFF JANUARY 31. RODRIGO SAID THE OPPOSITION HAD DECIDED, AFTER MUCH AGONIZING, TO FIELD CANDIDATES ON APRIL 2, ONLY TO HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS AFTER BLOC VOTING SCHEME ANNOUNCED. HE SAID THEY HAD DRAWN UP POWERFUL SLATE OF METRO-MANILA CANDIDATES, INCLUDING SALONGA, S.P. LOPEZ, CHARITO PLANAS, FATHER PACIFICO ORITZ, JAIME FERRER, TRINIDAD HERRERA, AND RODRIGO. GERRY ROXAS HAD BEEN PLANNING TO RUN FROM CAPIZ. EX-PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL, NOT RUNNING HIMSELF, HAD BEEN ORGANIZING SLAT IN PAMPANGA. JOSE DIOKNO, WHILE REFUSING TO RUN, HAD PLEDGED HIS COOPERATION. NINOY AQUINO ALREADY HAD BEEN PLANNING HIS TARLAC CAMPAIGN. RODRIGO SAID AQUINO HAD BEEN "SUPER-ENTHUSIASTIC" ABOUT RUNNING. AQUINO HAD WRITTEN POSITION PAPER ON THE ELECTION IN WHICH HE ARGUED THAT EVEN IF OPPOSITION LOST BADLY, THEY WOULD AT LEAST BE ABLE TO PROVIDE OUTLET FOR DISPARATE ANT-MARCOS ELEMENTS AND STRENGTHEN THEIR ORGANIZATION FOR THE FUTURE. AQUINO HAD CONTENDED THAT, DESPITE MARCOS' RHETORIC, THE PRESIDENT PROBABLY WANTED

THE PROMINENT OPPOSITIONISTS TO REMAIN ON SIDELINES.

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4. BLOC VOTING UPSETS PLANS. RODRIGO EXPLAINED THAT BLOC VOTING WOULD HURT OPPOSITION FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR GOVERNMENT MACHINE TO PERSUADE VOTERS TO VOTE STRAIGHT PRO-MARCOS TICKET THAN TO WRITE IN NAMED OF ALL PRO-MARCOS CANDIDATES. WITHOUT BLOC VOTING, CITIZENS WOULD HAVE TO PERUSE ENTIRE LIST OF CANDIATES, AND THERE WOULD BE GOOD CHANCE THEY MIGHT PICK WELL-KNOWN NAMES SUCH AS AQUINO AND SALONGA. BLOC VOTING, IN CONTRAST, RAISES SPECTER THAT OPPOSITION MIGHT BE SHUT OUT COMPLETELY. SECOND, BLOC VOTING ENCOURAGES VOTE FRAUD SINCE FRAUDULENT BALLOTS IN WHICH ONLY ONE CHECK MARK APPEARS ARE DIFFICULT TO DISTRINGUISH FROMVALID BALLOTS, AND ONE NAME IS EASIER TO ALTER THAN MANY.

5. RODRIGO SPECULATED THAT BLOC VOTING SCHEME WAS PUSHED THROUGH AT MRS. MARCOS' INSISTENCE. HE SAID LP INFOR-MANT ATTENDED JANUARY 26 MEETING OF MARCOS LOYALISTS CHAIRED BY COMELEC COMMISSIONER VENANCIO YANEZA AT WHICH MANY EXPRESSED ALARM AT STRENGTH OF OPPOSITION'S METRO MANILA SLATE. HE EXPLAINED THAT IT IS WELL-KNOWN MRS. MARCOS WANTS TO RUN FOR BATASANG PAMBANSA AND THAT SHE WOULD NEVER SETTLE FOR LESS THAN FIRST-PLACE FINISH. (SALONGA TOLD OTHER EMBOFF THAT WHILE SHE WOULD BE SURE TO WIN,SHE WANTS TO MAKE SURE HER TICKET-MATES ARE CARRIED AS WELL.) RODRIGO EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT
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BLOC VOTING COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN APPROVED UNLESS PRESIDENT MARCOS ALSO WANTED IT. RODRIGO GAVE NO CREDENCE WHATSOEVER TO MEDIA REPORTS THAT BLOC VOTING FORMAT IS DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO ENSURE ADEQUATE LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION FOR SMALLER PROVINCES.

6. PULLBACK TO MANILA MULLED. RODRIGO SAID AS SOON AS BLOC VOTING PLAN SURFACED, HE WENT TO FORT BONIFACIO TO DISCUSS IT WITH NINOY AQUINO. AQUINO STILL FAVORED PARTICIPATION. HE ARGUES THAT IT MIGHT EVEN HELP THE OPPOSITION IN CENTRAL LUZON, SINCE HE (AQUINO) COULD CARRY WEAKER CANDIDATES. RODRIGO SAID HE REMINDED AQUINO THAT HIS REGION INCLUDED NOT JUST TARLAC BUT PAMPANGA, BULACAN, AND ZAMBALES, WHERE PRO-MARCOS FORCES ARE STRONG. AQUINO BECAME SLIGHTLY MORE SUBDUED. HE AND RODRIGO THEN DREW UP ALTERNATIVE PLAN WHEREBY OPPOSITION WOULD RUN ONLY IN METRO-MANILA. AQUINO, ROXAS, AND EVEN ELDERLY FORMER SENATOR LORENZO TANADA WOULD JOIN OTHERS ON MANILA TICKET, FORMING SLATE SO STRONG THAT IT MIGHT STAND CHANCE EVEN WITH BLOC VOTING. RODRIGO PRESENTED THIS PLAN TO MEETING OF LIBERAL PARTY LEADERS ON JANUARY 30. MAJORITY WERE IN AGREEMENT AND STILL WILLING TO RUN, BUT SALONGA ADAMANTLY OPPOSED. SALONGA ARGUED THAT BLOC VOTING WAS FARCICAL AND WOULD BE DISASTROUS FOR OPPOSITION (SALONGA CONFIRMED THIS VIEW TO EMBOFF JANUARY 31.) RODRIGO SAID MOST OF THE OTHER OPPOSITIONISTS, INCLUDING HIMSELF, WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO PARTICIPATE WITHOUT SALONGA, SINCE HE HAS MORE POPULAR FOLLOWING THAN ANY OTHER OPPOSITIONIST EXCEPT AQUINO.

7. RODRIGO SAID HE PLANNED TO SEE AQUINO AFTERNOON JANUARY 31 TO CONVEY VIEWS OF OTHER LP LEADERS.

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8. COMMENT: PUBLIC RESPONSE TO BLOC VOTING SCHEME CONTINUES TO RANGE FROM LUKEWARM TO HOSTILE. THERE IS STILL CHANCE MARCOS MAY AMEND BATASANG BAYAN-APPROVED ELECTION CODE TO ELIMINATE THIS CONTENTIOUS PROVISION. IN THAT EVENT, OPPOSITION WOULD PROBABLY DOWNPLAY THEIR OTHER NINE PRECONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION AND ENTER THE ELECTORAL FRAY.
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